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Founded in 1918 as
National Preservers Association

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September 23, 1999

Dockets Management Branch (HFA-305)
Food and Drug Administration
5630 Fishers Lane, Room 1061
Rockville, Maryland 20857

RE: Docket No. 98N-0359; Program Priorities
in the Center For Food Safety and Applied
Nutrition

The International Jelly and Preserve Association (IJPA) appreciates the opportunity to provide input regarding FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition's (CFSAN) program priorities for the year 2000, as requested in the September 1 *Federal Register (FR)* notice (64 FR 47845). IJPA is a national trade association representing the manufacturers of jellies, jams, preserves and nonstandardized fruit spreads, and the suppliers of goods and services to the industry, including ingredient suppliers of fruit, sweeteners and pectin. A list of manufacturer members is enclosed.

We applaud the Agency for again inviting interested parties to provide input into the CFSAN priority-setting process. IJPA previously submitted comments on CFSAN's 1999 priorities in response to an earlier Agency request. (See IJPA's July 13, 1998 comments to the docket.) We continue to agree that the implementation of the President's Food Safety Initiative (FSI) should be CFSAN's top priority. As part of FSI, coordination on foodborne disease outbreaks should be a priority. Too often a food is wrongly implicated in a foodborne disease outbreak because of the lack of coordination among state and federal agencies investigating the outbreak.

The produce safety initiative also is important. The prevention of microbial contamination at the grower and packer levels will decrease the incidences of foodborne illnesses associated with fresh produce. The Agency's document, "Guidance for Industry--Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables," will be a useful tool to aid growers and packers, both domestic and foreign, in the prevention of microbial contamination.

However, as our earlier comments stated and the Agency itself noted in the September 1 notice, there are other important, on-going functions which the Agency should focus its efforts, namely the continued maintenance and administration of the food standards

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98N-0359

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program, promoting international harmonization, preventing economic fraud and enforcing product labeling. We still strongly believe these areas deserve CFSAN's attention and a place on the "A" list of priorities.

It is evident from comments received on the Agency's recent Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) on food standards (60 *FR* 67492; December 29, 1995) that a number of existing standards presently serve as barriers to the utilization of new technologies and required ingredients to improve existing products. As a result, petitions have been prepared and filed in several important product categories to affect needed amendments to recognize the advances in food technology and the need for flexibility.

IJPA submitted detailed comments on the ANPRM, pointing out the general benefits of maintaining core food standards and the beneficial interplay between those standards and the general standard adopted by FDA under the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act, 21 CFR 130.10. The Association also submitted a Citizen Petition which reflected the consensus reached within the fruit spread industry on how FDA should proceed in implementing the ANPRM with respect to the standards of identity of interest to this industry. The petition requested that the standards for artificially sweetened jellies and jams be repealed because the standards were obsolete and unnecessary. IJPA submitted the petition on March 31, 1997, and to date, no action has been taken by the Agency, despite the fact that the Association offered a solution to streamline the standards for these products. Further, IJPA has been notified that FDA will not act on the petition within the required statutory time limitation.

The goal of the ANPRM is important. Standards need to be updated and modernized in keeping with improving technology. Therefore, CFSAN must provide necessary resources and assign a high priority to this important function.

The modernization and maintenance of United States (U.S.) food standards is also important as the U.S. participates in the Codex Alimentarius process. In order for the U.S. to be an effective player within Codex, U.S. standards must be science-based and reflective of current practices, which will give the U.S. a strong basis for negotiation. It is, therefore, critical that the U.S. positions on several Codex standards be thoroughly reviewed by industry to assure that current industry practices are reflected. We, therefore, encourage more timely communications between FDA and industry.

In the increasingly global marketplace, the promotion of international harmonization is imperative and the U.S. should take a leadership role in the Codex process. It is crucial that U.S. positions be shared with other countries in a timely manner so meaningful discussions can occur during Codex committee meetings.

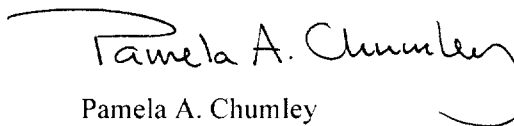
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Economic fraud also should be a CFSAN priority because of its importance to both consumers and industry. FDA must continue to pursue and prosecute fraudulent activities. Individuals and companies engaged in such activities are just as likely to have little regard for the welfare and safety of the public and should not be allowed to operate. FDA's efforts in this regard should be to enforce the existing statutory provisions.

Related to economic fraud is the accurate labeling of products. IJPA has alerted the Agency to several instances of economic fraud with respect to the inaccurate labeling of jams and jellies. The standards of identity for these products requires that the total soluble solids content of finished fruit preserves, jams and jellies be not less than 65%. However, there are products available on the market that have considerably lower total soluble solids content, but they are labeled as jams and jellies. This constitutes economic fraud because such products contain more moisture (water) and less fruit and/or sweeteners, which are expensive ingredients in the production of jams and jellies. The manufacturers of these products have a significant economic advantage over compliant products on the market. It is, therefore, important for FDA to enforce the accurate labeling of products.

In conclusion, IJPA appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on CFSAN's 2000 priorities. While we agree that the Food Safety Initiative should be CFSAN's top priority, the Agency is also responsible for other important functions as outlined in these comments. Thus, we encourage the Agency to balance its resources accordingly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pamela A. Chumley". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Pamela A. Chumley
President

PAC/jcm

Enclosure

ACTIVE MEMBERS

American Spoon Foods

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Clements Foods Company

T.W. Garner Food Company

M.A. Gedney Company

House of Webster, Inc.

JMS Specialty Foods, Inc.

Knott's Berry Farm Foods

The Kroger Company

The Red Wing Company, Inc.

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